

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 1399

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS:PINT, PN

SUBJECT: FINAL GOP-PRIVATE SECTOR MEETING SCHEDULED FOR TODAY

REF: PANAMA 1323

1. THIRD AND FINAL MEETING OF GOP AND PRIVATE SECTOR REPRESENTATIVES IN CURRENT SERIES OF "RENEWED DIALOGUE" IS SCHEDULED FOR THIS AFTER-NOON, FEBRUARY 25. PARTICIPANTS THUS FAR, IN ADDITION TO VICE PRESIDENT GONZALEZ, HAVE INCLUDED MINISTERS OF FINANCE, EDUCATION, COMMERCE, AND PLANNING. PRESIDENTS OF NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE (CONEP) AND PANAMANIAN ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS EXECUTIVES (APEDE) HAVE HEADED UP PRIVATE REPRESENTATION. ONE PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPANT TOLD EMBOFF THAT FIRST TWO SESSIONS BROKE UP INTO SMALLER MEETINGS, SIMILAR TO THOSE HELD DURING LAST FALL'S GOP CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE LINES OF COMMUNICATION WITH VARIOUS SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY. GENERAL TORRIJOS REPORTEDLY WILL ATTEND TODAY'S SESSION, AND SOME TYPE OF JOINT COMMUNIQUE IS EXPECTED TO BE ISSUED.

2. GOP APPARENTLY HAS KEPT ITS INTENTIONS REGARDING POSSIBLE RETURN OF EXILES CLOSELY GUARDED THUS FAR, WHILE SPECULATION ON SUBJECT CONTINUES TO RUN IN ALL DIRECTIONS. ONE PARTICIPANT FROM BANKING COMMUNITY INDICATED THAT SUBJECT WAS CONTINUALLY HINTED AT

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FROM PRIVATE SECTOR SIDE AND AVOIDED FROM GOVERNMENT SIDE. CHAMBER

OF COMMERCE HAD RECOMMENDED TO CONEP THAT INVITATION TO MEETINGS BE ACCEPTED ONLY ON EXPECTATION THAT THIS ISSUE WOULD BE ADDRESSED. CHAMBER'S RECOMMENDATIONS, APPEARING IN ITS WEEKLY COLUMN IN MONDAY EDITION OF SEMI-INDEPENDENT "ESTRELLA," ALSO CALLED FOR CLARIFICATION THAT PRESENCE OF PRIVATE SECTOR REPRESENTATIVES AT MEETINGS DID NOT SIGNIFY ACCEPTANCE OF "UNCONSTITUTIONAL EXPATRIATION OF PANAMANIANIS" AND QUESTIONED WHAT "GUARANTEES" WOULD BE GIVEN PARTICIPANTS IF DISCUSSION OF ECONOMIC OR SOCIO-POLITICAL THEMES WERE ALLOWED. A CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OFFICER HAS SINCE EXPRESSED TO US SATISFACTION THAT MEETINGS WERE GOING AS WELL AS THEY WERE, BUT THERE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE ANY INCREASED EXPECTATION AT MOMENT THAT JOINT COMMUNIQUE WILL INCLUDE ANNOUNCEMENT OF RETURN OF EXILES.

3. LOCAL PRESS TOOK BRIEF NOTE OF FIRST, FEBRUARY 23, SESSION ONLY. A FURTHER REMINDER OF ABSENCE OF EXILES WAS GIVEN IN "ESTRELLA" OF FEBRUARY 23, WHICH PICTURED WIVES OF EXILED ROBERTO EISENMANN AND RUBEN CARLES SEATED AT HEAD TABLE OF DINNER MEETING OF APEDE HELD OVER WEEKEND.

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